

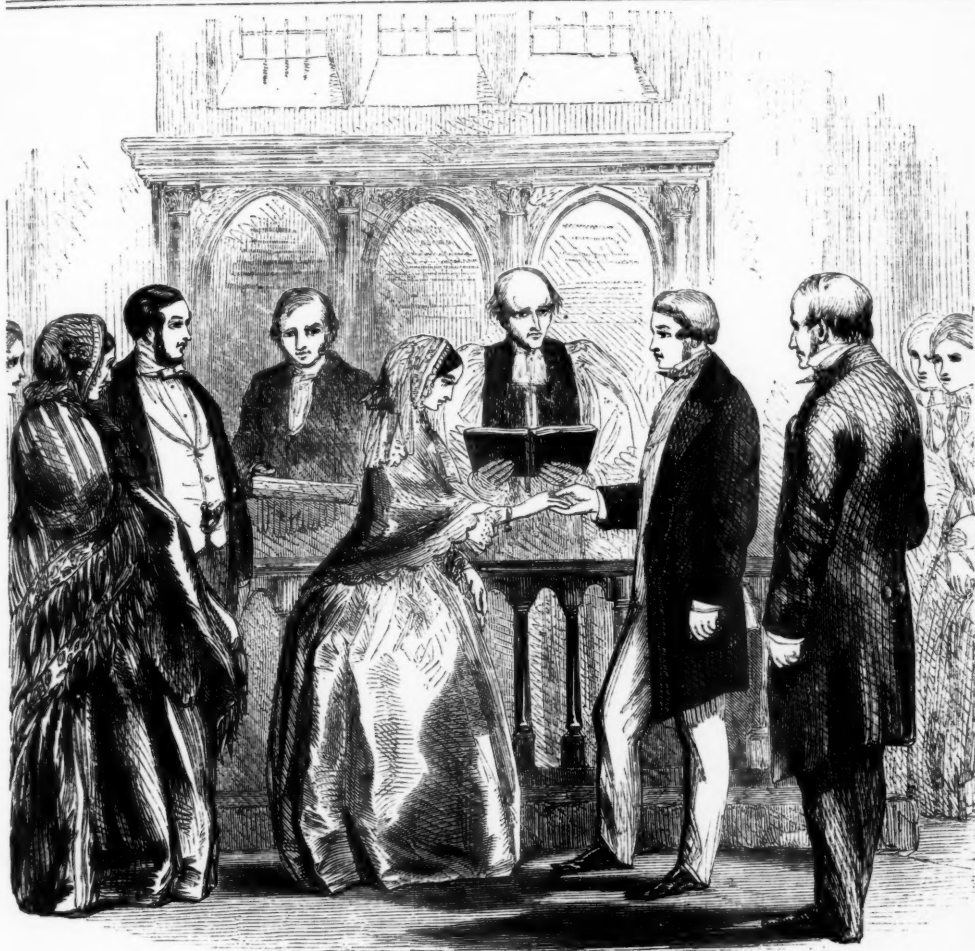
# THE LEISURE HOUR

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JESSIE'S WEDDING.

## GEOFFREY THE GENIUS, AND PERCY THE PLODDER.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "ARCHIE CAMPBELL."

CHAPTER IX.

GEOFFREY ARMITAGE had not passed more than six years in the busy restless world of London, without obtaining a certain degree of that notoriety for which he had so long panted. His name, inscribed on the door-posts of his centrally situated office,

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gave no intimation to the uninitiated of his particular calling; but it was soon known and understood by those interested in discovering a wealthy (and, as some fancied, inexperienced) individual who would entertain the various projects they wished to advance. Brokers, jobbers, active agents for needy patentees of clever inventions, "requiring only capital to be worked to almost a *fabulous* amount of remuneration," (in many instances

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proving quite true in the latter part of the description,) were amongst his daily visitors; and his only difficulty appeared to be the choice he should make amongst the tempting plans for doubling and trebling his capital, so *disinterestedly* placed before his notice. Mindful of the advice of the late "oracle Needham," he put as many irons in the fire as possible, forgetful of the proverb which his still older friend, Uncle William, might have quoted as a caution thereon, and soon there were few schemes or speculations on foot, in which he did not possess some interest or participation.

Public events also favoured his wishes and resolutions. The political horizon of continental nations became obscured by clouds; but the mutterings of the storm, which shook the foundations of monarchy and order, were heard at a safe distance from their influence; and Geoffrey took immediate advantage of these alarming signs. Copying the example of a speculator of a by-gone age, he scrupled not to fabricate news and insinuate false intelligence; and as at that exciting period the events of a day might decide the fate of a kingdom, all information was eagerly sought. Sometimes the panic would spread, prices of stocks and shares suddenly descended ruinously, and the wily Geoffrey speedily reaped the benefit by employing brokers to purchase at the reduced prices. The sarcastic line of the poet seemed realized in his case:

"Satan tempts young sinners with success;"

for, at this time, everything in which he embarked money, whether foreign or domestic, prospered, and he was able to write to his father with exultation of his improved position. True, it had its pains and penalties, but these he named not. He did not tell of the constant racking thought, the alternations of hope and fear, and other excitements unfavourable to health; but in the exciting "race for gold," the months rapidly sped on, until they swelled into another year, and then came a strange and troublous time.

The sanguinary triumphs of embattled hosts, which, in the past year, had sent hundreds of fellow-beings to the domains of the dread monarch Death, did not suffice to appease his appetite for human victims; for suddenly a dark, insidious, and mysterious disease from the distant east swept on viewless pinions through the land, and bore away the hopes and joys of many a happy circle.

A telegraphic despatch was delivered to Geoffrey one morning on his entering the office, the contents of which made him rush off again to secure a rich advantage before others should be equally well informed. He returned chuckling with pleasure at his success. Another of the swift electric messages awaited him. The envelope bore the mark of the station nearest his home. He tore it open; the words were few but startling. "Your father has been seized with cholera; come home immediately. WILLIAM BELFORD."

A loud cry escaped his lips: he dashed downstairs, and in another minute he was driving rapidly towards the railway station, where he found the express train just about to start. He threw himself into a carriage, and in a few hours reached the

Manor House; but, alas! too late; his fond indulgent father was no more; and Geoffrey and Jessie stood clasped in each other's arms, and wept the orphan's tears!

A few short months made many alterations in Nestlebury. The first shock of his father's death having subsided, Geoffrey again felt the corroding influence of his late selfish pursuits and worldly plans, and the will of the Squire helped to replace them in their "proud pre-eminence." Mr. Armistage left the bulk of his property to his son, with the exception of £5000 to Jessie, and a trifling memento of friendship to Mr. Belford; but even this comparatively small portion of his daughter was placed under the care of her brother until she became of age, and he was appointed her sole trustee; the fond father having expressed his confidence in Geoffrey's affection for his sister, and his conviction that he would do what was best for her interests.

"And depend upon it, Jessie, I will do so," he said, as he pressed his weeping sister to his breast; "you shall have no cause to regret that my father has left me guardian of your property." He meant all he said, but no generous feeling woke within his heart to prompt the adding something from his own large share of his father's fortune to the small one apportioned to his sister. "I shall let the Manor House for a year or so," was the next cool resolution; "perhaps then I may sell it."

"And where am I to live, Geoffrey?" was the tearful inquiry.

"With me, child, of course; you must come up to town, and I shall take a small house somewhere in the suburbs, where we can live cheap and snug for a few years, until I have turned my securities into double or treble their present value; and then, Jessie, you shall see how a wealthy speculator can enjoy himself."

But this plan met with opposition. Jessie timidly expressed her dislike to it; Mrs. Malcolm with almost motherly affection pleaded against her favourite's immediate removal, and Uncle William brought arguments and proverbs against the rupture of their happy party. Consequently, the first act of power in the guardian brother was a gracious one; he left his sister to regain her health and spirits with her well-beloved country friends, and set off himself to his equally beloved scrip and omnium, bonds and bills.

The Manor House remained without a tenant, and the sight of its closed shutters and the thoughts of its silent rooms gave many a pang to the bosom of its late gentle young mistress, as she took her way through the village, and felt how different were now the means she had to do good with, from what her generous loving father had allowed her; but she felt glad that she had still a path of duty to follow, in which, although no longer strewn with the glittering sands of riches and superfluity, she might still gather sweet flowers and inhale perfume.

It is not the mere gift of money, or the dole of food, which touches the heart and moves the gra-

titude of the country poor; a trivial act of kindly sympathy, a few words of comfort, performed or uttered in the hour of need and sickness, will often bring more genuine thanks from rustic lips than the regular and expected donation of clothes and fuel from the proud owner of the soil, who shows no other interest in the humble recipients of his bounty. Lift the latch of the peasants' cottage door, sit down and listen to their tale of trials, show interest in the "simple annals of the poor," caress their children, prove that you own the tie of Christian fellowship, and though on leaving you may be constrained to say, "Silver and gold have I none," yet be assured your visit will have cast a cheering influence on the scanty fire and the frugal meal, and leave a glow within your own breast, which those who give no other donative than money, and that perhaps by proxy, never feel.

In the private office of an influential person in the money market of the great metropolis, were one morning seated this important individual and a guest. They were both young men, and both well-looking; but the host had lines traced on his brow by other hands than those of Time; and although in reality there were not more than two years difference in their age, he looked the senior by nearly ten. His usual sharp, keen glance was now softened by memories of the past, and the manner which, in that room, was generally haughty, harsh, or cold, had yielded to the genial influence of old friendship, and became sociable, natural, and warm.

"And so you wish to do me the honour of becoming my brother-in-law," he said in answer to a communication which had just left an ingenuous flush on the countenance of his companion. "I am sincerely pleased at the confession; there are few men I would sooner greet as such than yourself. I always fancied when we were at school together at Birchingdale that you had a lurking kindness for Jessie, and from the day when, at a picnic to the ruins of — Castle, you clambered up the tottering wall to save the life of the unfledged starling which she had seen fall out of its nest, I believe my little sister has looked up to you as a perfect hero."

"Be that as it may," returned the other, with a smile, "I hope she has since found more solid foundations for her good opinion than the thoughtless impulse of an impetuous boy."

Yes, it was Geoffrey Armitage, the fortunate speculator—the mysterious "party" who took the lion's share in profitable schemes—the unseen arbiter of many an older man's commercial destiny—who there sat face to face with his less ambitious but quietly successful school-fellow, Percival Malcolm. Some years had passed since last they had met at the funeral of Mr. Armitage; and now, in the prime of manhood, with the consciousness of his steadfast will and resolution to keep the "even tenor of his way," which hitherto had brought him competence as his reward, he felt he might honestly ask for the happiness of a wife's society to share his blessings, and be the "help-met" heaven

ordained for man. Jessie's gentle temper, her unselfish thoughtfulness, her unpretending but sincere devotion, had all been shown in the trying scenes of her father's illness and death, in the subsequent calls upon her fortitude and self-denial, and in her grateful affection towards her long-proved friends. These charms of character, repeated and commented on by his mother and uncle, doubly strengthened Percy's youthful bias, and he installed in the inner shrine of his heart the hope of making her his wife, when prudence could place the seal upon affection's bond. That time had now arrived; Jessie, with modest joy, received the tender of his heart and hand, and with ingenuous truthfulness gave them the acceptance they so well merited.

"Ay, I thought as much," was Uncle William's remark, when a few hours afterwards the happy quartette met in the cottage parlour; "as the old Danish proverb says, 'A bird may be ever so small, it always seeks a nest of its own.' Well, my children, take an old man's best wishes for the comfort and stability of *your* nest; may it be built by industry, cemented by principle, and lined with the soft down of affection. But now, to drop metaphor, and speak upon business,"—and then followed the advice that Percy should at once see Geoffrey in the triple character of Jessie's brother, guardian, and trustee; and it was in compliance with this suggestion that the interview took place of which we have so lately spoken, and to which we will now revert.

Geoffrey himself broached the subject of his sister's little fortune, and in the most frank manner proclaimed his willingness to change the security in which it was now invested, as soon as Jessie attained her majority (of which she still wanted some months), if, at that period, her husband should feel dissatisfied with the interest of five per cent. which he had hitherto received for it. This in itself would have disarmed suspicion, even had it ever existed in Percival's mind; but, as "to the pure, all things are pure," it had never entered into that bright home of integrity, and the subject was instantly dismissed. Then followed Geoffrey's half-mocking inquiry: "But now of yourself, Percy, have you realized a fortune yet, or is it still to be made?"

Percival detailed with modest exultation that Mr. Montague had just concluded a partnership with him which would yield him a handsome income; "at least what *we* consider such," he added smilingly. "I am still but a 'plodder' in my habits and feelings, consequently you must measure my prospects by *my* gauge, not your own, or you may form very erroneous ideas of my handsome income."

"Probably," replied his companion, with a peculiar smile, as he unlocked a drawer in his writing-table and drew forth some papers. "Look here, Percy; these are the representatives of five hundred shares in a copper mine, which the first buyer was glad to let me have for one-tenth of his purchase money. These are consignments of goods coming into port, which will produce me 30 per cent. for my advance. Here are a thousand scrip shares in the 'Grand Union Slickville and Tryiton Railway,' which my friend Mr. Buttermouth, one of the

American directors, obtained me on most advantageous terms; and this"—opening a small square leather-covered box—"is a patent of which I have purchased three-fourths for a mere song. It is true I must find the money to work it, but that I shall easily accomplish. Twist and Jobham are now preparing a prospectus, and when once 'The patent consolidated Peat, Fuel, and Candle Company' is set afloat, the public will take it up with avidity."

"It appears a strange amalgamation," interrupted Percy.

"Which can be easily explained," was the prompt reply. "Peat is known to contain much oleaginous matter, which by our process will be expressed and condensed so as to give a large proportion for making into candles, and leave the heavier residuum to be dried for fuel, for which there is a market on the spot. We have already made a capital bargain in the purchase of a large tract of bog land in Ireland: bought it, sir," warming with his subject, "by the eye; not by the wary measurement of the line, at so much per acre: no, no. Went to the top of one mountain peak, and gave so much for the whole space between that and another summit, and a splendid thing we shall make of it. I could show you other proofs of the different sorts of grist which come to my money mill," he added, rather pompously; "but even these will convince you that I still deserve my name of 'Geoffrey the Genius.'"

"And are you happy in this whirl of excitement?" Percy asked.

"I am, though only in the comparative degree. I look on it as the means to an end. I must have wealth such as will make me known and talked of, and then, but not till then, I shall say, 'Hold, enough!'"

As Percival returned home that night, the remembrance of Geoffrey's restless craving after gain and riches quite saddened him. Many of his uncle's proverbs against the modern mania came into his thoughts, and one especially remained with painful pertinacity. It was as if an invisible monitor was incessantly repeating in his ear, "Much would have more, and so lost all."

Before the summer tints had mellowed into the richer hues of autumn, the friends met again. This time it was in the quiet glorious country, where all the turmoil of the money-hunting world appeared unknown, where barter and the restless excitement of speculation would have seemed out of place, and where the soul, refreshed, refined, invigorated by the purity around, awakes to all the majesty of Nature, and sends its grateful incense up to "Nature's God."

Geoffrey was present at his sister's wedding, which proved a pretty as well as happy scene. Again did the mother's voice tremble with thankfulness and joy as Mrs. Malcolm blessed her son and his youthful bride, ere they set forth for their future home. Again did the moisture gather in Uncle William's eyes, and his throat require clearing, before he could say, "Farewell to his boy and his little Jessie," and give utterance to a few oracular sentences for their future guidance. Even Geoffrey was touched as his sister left the friends

of her childhood, to enter on an untried sphere of duties; but as soon as they had driven from the door, he too said "Good-bye" to Mr. Belford and his sister, and set off to resume his struggles in the hazardous arena of speculation.

## THE GARDEN.

### CHAPTER I.

ONE of the least mistakeable of the evidences of civilization among a people is the fondness for gardening, and the prevalence of the practice of gardening manifested by them. The savage who hunts his prey in the forest, who spears the fish in the waters, or snares the wild fowl of the marsh, though he may rudely cultivate a little maize or grain for store against famine, has no notion of cultivating anything for the mere pleasure the sight of it will afford him, and consequently has no notion of a garden. Before the garden can exist, there must be the sacred institution of home, with which the garden, if it be not locally connected, as it most frequently is, is yet intimately allied, and of which it may even be said to form a part. When the home is established, the garden naturally follows, spreading around it a halo of brightness and beauty, and clasping it in an embrace of tenderness and joy. That this is the natural instinct of civilized man with regard to his home, we see everywhere: the site of the house is the site of the garden; and though in our crowded cities Mammon has fixed his grasp on the soil that should blossom around our dwellings, and filled the adytum of the sacred temple with the tables of the money-changers, yet even here the garden is a household word, though it is too often but little more than the unsightly prison of a few starving roots and shrubs.

The idea of the garden has doubtless been of slow growth. Born in some simple mind impressed with the loveliness of natural objects, it was probably the first creation of man's ingenuity in which the principles of Art—the love of colour and of form—assumed a tangible shape. The fair wild-flowers and the graceful shrubs of the forest, planted round his dwelling, were man's first garden; and ages must have elapsed ere the cunning of the floriculturist, seconded by the bounty of the soil, transformed the wild weeds of the wilderness into the floral glories of the parterre. Lord Bacon, in that quaint and suggestive essay of his on the subject, says that "men learned to build stately before they learned to garden finely;" and he says so with good reason. There lay in the quarry, ready to his hand, the materials for the grandest edifices he could design; but the flowers and the shrubs which were to enable him to "garden finely" existed, many if not most of them, for thousands of years, in forms little attractive to unobservant eyes, and had to be improved by careful cultivation through successive generations, ere they shone as gems in the garden. The ideas of the great inductive philosopher, by the way, on the subject of the garden, were remarkably liberal and grand, though we confess, spite of the heresy of which we shall be deemed guilty, they



are not altogether to our taste. He would not have less than thirty acres to his garden inclosure, with ample provision of groves and open spaces for shade and sun, and for a consecutive series of pleasant sights and delicious odours at all seasons of the year: but with all these delights he would mingle more carpenter's work and formality than we should care to see, and, spite of his "wilderness," would lay too much restraint upon the freedom of nature.

Among the most ancient gardens of which there is any description now extant, we shall refer to a few only. The garden of Alcinoüs, so poetically described in Homer's *Odyssey*, is perhaps the most renowned; but this famous paradise fell far short of Bacon's idea: it was but four acres in extent, and even that contained a vineyard and an orchard as well as a garden with flowing fountains. But the gardens of King Solomon existed previous to that of Alcinoüs; and though there is no precise account of them in the sacred writings, it is clear that they must have been much more extensive; for we all know that they were planted with flowers, fruit trees, and spices in abundance, and that they must have been a favourite resort of the royal philosopher, who studied botany with the fervour of a man of science, and wrote of plants, "from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop on the wall."

One of the great wonders of ancient times were the hanging gardens of Babylon. They are supposed to have been a series of terraces rising one above another, to a great height, and covered with fit soil for the growth even of the largest trees; the terraces were raised on vaulted apartments which formed a portion of the palace, and were kept cool by the overhanging foliage. From their elevation they commanded an extensive view, and they were so firmly constructed as to survive for some centuries the destruction of the monarchy.

Little is known concerning the gardens of the ancient Greeks. They had their Academeus, which was a wood of olive trees, with pleasant walks, the resort of the philosophers of the time; and the most celebrated teachers had gardens of their own, in which they received and entertained those who sought them for instruction or counsel. It is probable, however, that the Grecian Academe bore but small resemblance to the modern garden.

The Romans, it would appear, paid little attention to gardening, except for purposes of utility, until a very late period of their history. The gardens of Lucullus are the first which are described as of any magnificence; and he, indeed, carried extravagance so far as to surpass all who came after him. The Tusculan villa of Cicero, though so often mentioned, is nowhere particularly described in his works. Virgil has a few lines on the subject of gardens, but no more. One of the few descriptions of a Roman garden which enters into detail, is that given by Pliny, in speaking of his Tuscan villa; and that, notwithstanding the praise it has met with from the commentators and lovers of classic learning, is not very creditable to Roman taste in gardening. In fact, we find it identical almost with the absurd and ridiculous conceits

which, said to have originated among the Dutch, prevailed in this country and in France about the beginning of the last century and later. It is undeniable that the elegant Pliny delighted in what would now raise the laughter of a London mob; he speaks with boastful enthusiasm of his box trees shorn into unnatural shapes, of slopes and terraces, of shrubs clipped to pattern, of pipes spouting water, and cascades falling into a basin; of bay trees and planes planted alternately, with obelisks stationed between them, and of names and inscriptions in box, precisely in the manner of the worthy Dutchmen of the time of William III. Can it be that the worthy Hollanders, who inoculated the north of Europe with their cruelly vile conceits, did not invent them, but stole them bodily from the polished Roman consul? It looks very much as though that were the case.

We may here quit the subject of ancient gardens, and leap a long interval of time; for it would be but an unsatisfactory task to attempt to follow the history through the middle ages. The monks, we know, did not neglect the orchard and kitchen garden. That the pleasure garden made its advent in Europe in a sort of Dutch dress, we think there cannot be a doubt, though it is not clear at what period these odd principles of gardening first came into operation. We are of opinion that this country was long free from them after they had obtained upon the continent. Be that as it may, we know that the most hideous absurdities prevailed here, even so lately as a hundred years ago; for we find the best writers and the men of taste of that day assailing them with the ridicule they deserved, and finally succeeding in ousting them from public favour. It was the fashion with our great-grandfathers to ornament their gardens with monsters carved in the thick foliage of yews and cypresses; to twist the rough elms into the shapes of living creatures, or to lop the oak into the form of some apocryphal Colossus. A retired cook actually beautified his country garden with the fac-simile of a coronation dinner in greens, where he had the champion flourishing on horseback at one end, and the queen in perpetual youth at the other. Pope launched the shafts of his wit against such enormous stupidities; in a paper in the "*Guardian*," he announces a pretended sale, at which the virtuosi are called to compete for a whole catalogue of such *lusus nature*. Among them were "St. George, in box, his arm scarce long enough, but will be in a condition to stick the dragon next April; a green dragon of the same, with a tail of ground ivy for the present; a pair of giants stunted, to be sold cheap; divers eminent poets in bays, to be had a pennyworth; a quick-set hog, shot up into a porcupine by being forgot a week in rainy weather; a lavender pig, with sage growing in his belly," etc. etc.

Pope lived to witness the spread of that reform in gardening which he did so much to promote, not only by his pen, but by the example he set in his own garden at Twickenham. At this time, Kent, an artist by profession, turned his attention to the subject, and, being backed by the poet, soon

acquired patronage sufficient to enable him to test his new principles. He abolished the high stone walls inclosing the garden ground, and substituted a sunk fence; and, seeing and feeling that all Nature was a garden, introduced the fair irregularities of Nature in lieu of the insipid formalities of the old school. He changed the tame level for the delicious contrast of hill and valley gliding imperceptibly into each other; he planted groves on slight eminences, extended the perspective by breaking up the distance with groups of trees, and shut out the sight of deformities by screens of plantation. Instead of spouting water through pipes into basins, he allowed it to meander at pleasure, now concealed by thickets, now expanding into a lake, now bubbling over a bed of pebbles in a brook, or rushing down the gorge of a ravine. He planted trees as in accidental positions, on the banks, and left them their beautiful natural forms unmitigated; and thus, concealing his art by his knowledge of art, exhibited what seemed a new creation to the eyes of his wondering patrons. In a few years, Kent completely put to the rout all the old and ridiculous notions which had so long prevailed, and had given birth to a new science, which, under him, was for the first time worthy of the name. At the present day the old style of gardening must be sought for in old engravings, there being hardly a single surviving specimen of it remaining in this country. In Holland, remnants of it are by no means wanting, and the same may be said of France, where, in the gardens of the provincial châteaux, the old style is, under some modifications, partially preserved, and, strange to say, is not without its charms when mingled with the new.

Kent was succeeded by "Capability" Brown—a man who, if less imbued with the principles of art, had as fine a feeling for Nature, and who saw at a glance how best to turn to advantage any peculiarities of soil or site. He acquired his soubriquet from a habit he had of saying, "This spot possesses great capabilities;" it was his uniform verdict, whatever might be the nature of the ground upon which he was called to pronounce. But he almost invariably made good his assertion, and would produce an admirable landscape-garden out of the merest waste and the most unpromising material. He left the impress of his peculiar talent, ere he died, in almost every county in England.

The reform which Kent and Brown inaugurated has been carried out to the full, and far more completely than either of them imagined, by the landscape-gardeners of the present day. The principles of their art are now as well defined and as well understood as those of any other that could be named. The gardens now attached to the ancestral homes of England are as fine as any to be found on the globe, and some of them transcend in magnificence all that we read of among the wonders of the ancient world. The most lavish expense has not been spared in their preparation and adornment. Almost every flower that blows on the face of the earth, which possesses the charm either of colour for the eye or fragrance for the smell, is to be found in the vast conservatories of Chatsworth

or of Blenheim. Every species of delicious fruit is also grown in the forcing-houses of the wealthy; and the rarest exotics from every clime, tenderly fostered in palaces of glass, supplement the luxury of their abodes. It is a rule that the tastes and habits of the great are always reflected in those of the humbler classes, and in nothing is the operation of this rule more prominently visible than in the love of gardens and gardening. Throughout the length and breadth of the entire land, except in the heart of the city or town, and sometimes even there, the home of the Englishman is surrounded or flanked by his cultivated garden: the rearing of choice flowers, the growing of choice fruit, is a passion as well as a pleasing occupation; every county, every township, every parish has its flower-shows and horticultural festivals, whose honours are competed for and prizes won. The cottager, the weaver, the shoemaker, the humblest artisan of to-day, is learned in dahlias, fuchsias, calceolarias, and a host of other plants, the very names of which were unknown to men who squandered fortunes on Dutch tulips and carved hideous gorgons out of vegetable masses. Within the last half-century, the list of new flowers, added to the gardens even of the poorest, far outnumbers all those which, not coming under the denomination of weeds or wild-flowers, were indigenous to the soil. From the poor man's garden they overflow into the streets of our towns and cities; they adorn our mantel-pieces, and diffuse their sweet breath in our close and sultry chambers; their beautiful presence cheers us at our labour, soothes us in our sickness, and sheds a gleam of sunshine on the gloomiest contingencies of our lot. Flowers are the graceful compensations which Nature scatters at random for those who love her; the garden is the laboratory in which she loves to produce the masterpieces of her skill.

#### JOHN FROISSART.

JOHN FROISSART, called by the courtesy of the time Sir John, in honour of his being priest and chaplain, devoted a long life to the collection of the fullest and most trustworthy accounts of all the events and personages characteristic of his time. From 1326, when his labours commence, to 1400, when his active pen stood still, nothing happened in any part of Europe that the Paul Pry of the period did not rush off to verify on the spot. If he heard of an assemblage of knights going on at the extremities of France, or in the centre of Germany; of a tournament at Bordeaux, a court gala in Scotland, or a marriage festival at Milan, his travels began—whether in the humble guise of a solitary horseman, with his portmanteau behind his saddle, and a single greyhound at his heels, as he jogged wearily across the Border, till he finally arrived in Edinburgh; or in his grander style of equipment, gallant steed, with hackney led beside him, and four dogs of high race gambolling round his horse, as he made his dignified journey from Ferrara to Rome. Wherever life was to be seen and painted, the indefatigable Froissart was to be

found. Whatever he had gathered up on former expeditions, whatever he learned on his present tour, down it went in his own exquisite language, with his own poetical impression of the pomps and pageantries he beheld; and when at the end of his journey he reached the court of prince or potentate, no higher treat could be offered to the "noble lords and ladies bright" than to form a glittering circle round the enchanting chronicler, and listen to what he had written. From palace to palace, from castle to castle, the unwearied "picker-up of unconsidered trifles" (which, however, were neither trifles nor unconsidered, when their true value became known, as giving life and reality to the annals of a whole period), pursued his happy way, certain of a friendly reception when he arrived, and certain of not losing his time by negligence or blindness on the road. If he overtakes a stately cavalier, attended by squires and men-at-arms, he enters into conversation, drawing out the experiences of the venerable warrior by relating to him all he knew of things and persons in which he took an interest. And when they put up at some hostelry on the road, and while the gallant knight was sound asleep on his straw-stuffed couch, and his followers were wallowing amid the rushes on the parlour floor, Froissart was busy with pen and note-book, scoring down all the old gentleman had told him, all the fights he had been present at, and the secret history (if any) of the councils of priests and kings. In this way, knights in distant parts of the world became known to each other. The same voice which described to Douglas at Dalkeith the exploits of the Prince of Wales, sounded the praises of Douglas in the ears of the Black Prince at Bordeaux. A community of sentiment was produced between the upper ranks of all nations by this common register of their acts and feelings; and knight-hood received its most ennobling consummation in these imperishable descriptions, at the very time when its political and military influence came to a close. Froissart's Chronicles are the epitaph of feudalism, written indeed while it was yet alive, but while its strength was only the convulsive energy of approaching death. The standard of knightly virtue became raised in proportion as knightly power decayed. In the same way as the increased civilization and elevating influences of the time clothed the Church in colours borrowed from the past, while its real influence was seriously impaired, the expiring embers of knighthood occasionally flashed up into something higher; and in this century we read of Du Guesclin of France, Walter Manny, and Edward the Third of England, and many others, who illustrated the order with qualifications it had never possessed in its palmyest state.\*

#### ENGLISH BOWMEN AND RIFLEMEN.

WHILE the youth of England are forming their patriotic rifle corps, it may not be out of place to

recall the services rendered in old times by the bearers of a ruder weapon. It was by the bowmen that victory was gained in the days of Crecy, Poitiers, and Agincourt. Every English yeoman was a skilful archer, and no village was without its "butts" for practice. With what effect their archery told in war, may be gathered from THE BATTLE OF POITIERS, as described by the chronicler referred to in the preceding article.

"The (English) prince learned that the French king had so placed himself, that he could not return without fighting him. So he marched on, all that day, in close order, to within a few leagues of Poitiers; when the Captal de Buch, Sir Eustace d'Ambreticourt, and other knights, with two hundred horsemen, were sent forward to see where the French were camped. They found all the plain covered with men-at-arms; and, being themselves well armed and mounted, they could not refrain from attacking the French rear, unhorsing many, and taking some prisoners. This being told to the king as he was about entering Poitiers, he turned back, ordering his army to make for the open fields, where, very late in the day, they took up their quarters. The prince's detachment returning, told him what vast numbers of the French there were. For they were upwards of sixty thousand, among whom were twenty-five dukes and earls, besides the four young sons of the king; the Duke of Normandy, the Lord Lewis, the Lord John, and the Lord Philip. The prince made answer:—'God help us! we must then now think how we may best fight them.' For he had scarce twelve thousand with which to meet his enemies. The English were that night quartered in a very strong position, among vineyards and hedges; and both armies kept good watch.

"The next morning, which was Sunday, the king being very impatient for the battle, received the holy communion with his sons, and then held a council with his great lords. At this it was ordered that the whole army should advance into the plain, each lord, of whom there were more than six score, displaying his banner, and then push forward. Upon this the trumpets sounded, each one armed himself fully, mounted his horse, and made for that part of the plain where the king's banner was planted and fluttering in the wind. There might be seen all the barons and gentlemen of France, richly dressed in bright armour, with banners and pennons gallantly displayed; none for fear of dishonour might remain at home.

"The army was drawn up in three divisions, each of sixteen thousand men-at-arms; the first under the Duke of Orleans, with thirty-six banners, and twice as many pennons; the second under the Duke of Normandy, and his brothers, the lords Lewis and John; the third under the king himself. While they were forming, the king commanded three of his lords to ride forward, as near the English as they could, that they might see how they bore themselves, and how they might be best attacked. Then mounting a white palfrey, he rode to the head of his army, and said aloud: 'You men of Paris, Chartres, Rouen, and Orleans, have been wont to threaten what you would do to the

\* From "The Eighteen Christian Centuries." By the Rev. James White. Blackwood & Sons. A useful compendium of modern history.

English, if you could find them; now you shall have your will, I will lead you on to meet them, and let us see how you will avenge yourselves for all the mischief and hurt they have done you; rest you sure, we will not part without fighting.' They replied: 'Sir, so be it, that will we do gladly.' Just then the three lords returned, and pushing through the crowd, said to the king: 'Sir, we have seen the Englishmen, who in numbers may be about two thousand men-at-arms, four thousand archers, and fifteen hundred footmen. They are in a very strong position, and though we do not imagine they can make more than one division, yet they have posted themselves right skillfully; the only way in which you can get at them, is to pass through their midst, for they have fortified all the road, by the hedge-side, and lined the hedges with archers. You can come at them by no other way, and it is so narrow that scarce can four men ride through it abreast. At the end of this lane, amidst vines and thorns, where none can ride, or march in order, are posted the men-at-arms, afoot, with the archers drawn up before them, in the manner of a harrow, so that it will be no easy matter to defeat them.'" \* \* \*

The greater part of the next day was occupied in fruitless attempts at coming to terms. While the truce lasted, the English made many mounds and ditches round about where the archers were, to make their position more secure; and on the next day (that was Monday) both armies were again drawn out in battle array.

"The prince's army was ordered nearly as before. He himself was with the main body in the midst of the vineyards, all a-foot, but with their horses near at hand in case of need; their weaker parts were fortified, and enclosed with their waggons and baggage. Then when all were set in due array, the prince said to them: 'Sirs, though we be but a small company, let us not be therefore cast down, for victory lyeth not in the multitude of people, but where God shall send it. If it chance that the day be ours, great honour and glory shall we have thereby; and if we die in our just quarrel, then the king my father, and my brethren, and ye, have good friends and kinsmen that shall revenge us. Therefore, sirs, for God's sake, I entreat you to do your best this day, for if it please him, ye shall see me a good knight.' By such words as these, the prince and his marshals mightily encouraged his men, so that they were all in good spirits for the battle. Sir John Chandos remained near the prince all that day to guard and advise him. But the Lord James Audley, a valiant and prudent knight, entreated of the prince to let him leave him, that he might be the foremost in the attack, for he had, of a long time, had a vow so to be. The which the prince granted, saying: 'Sir James, God grant that you may this day shine in valour above all other knights.' So the Lord James set off with four of his squires, to post himself in front of the battalion.

"The fight then began on both sides; the French advancing into the lane, whose hedges on both sides were lined with the English archers. But no sooner had the French fairly entered the lane, than

the English archers, who lined the hedges on both sides, shot at them so fiercely, that their horses, smarting from the wounds of these barbed arrows, turned, and, becoming unmanageable, threw their riders, who could not get up again in the press and confusion. Those who struggled through were so fiercely assailed by the Lord James Audley and others, that they were soon discomfited." \* \* \*

"King John on that day proved himself a good knight; and if the fourth of his people had done as well as he, the day would have been his own. He brought up his troops in excellent order to meet the English, and many hard blows were struck with swords, battle-axes, and other warlike weapons. But those about him were either slain or taken prisoners; and then some of the English who knew the king, cried out to him, 'Yield yourself, or you are a dead man.' There was a young knight from St. Omer, named Denis de Morbeque, in the service of the king of England, who was near King John when he was pulled about amid the press of those who were trying to take him. Being very strong, he forced his way through the crowd, and said to the king, in good French, 'Sir, sir, yield yourself.' The king, turning to him, said, 'To whom shall I yield myself? where is my cousin the Prince of Wales? I would speak with him.' 'Sir,' said Sir Denis, 'yield yourself to me, and I will lead you to him.' 'Who are you?' said the king. 'Sir,' he replied, 'I am Sir Denis de Morbeque, a knight from Artois; but I serve the king of England, having forfeited all I possessed in France.' The king then gave him the gauntlet from his right hand, saying, 'I yield myself to you.'

"The Prince of Wales was courageous as a lion, and he took great delight that day to combat his enemies. Sir John Chandos, who had never quitted his person the whole day, nor stopped to make prisoners, when the battle was nigh an end, said to him: 'Sir, it were good that you rested here, and set your banner on the top of this bush, to collect your forces, which are much scattered; for I do not see any banners or pennons of the French which might attack us.' So the banner was set up, and there was sound of trumpet, and minstrels playing for the victory. The prince then took off his helmet, and entered a small pavilion of a crimson colour, that had been set up for him, and where they served him and his knights with wine. The number of the knights was increasing continually as they returned from the pursuit (which had been carried with much slaughter, even so far as the gate of Poitiers,) and stopped at the prince's tent, surrounded by their prisoners. Even the archers had some of them so many as four, five, or six prisoners.

"When the two marshals were come back from the pursuit, the prince asked them if they knew anything of the king of France. They answered him: 'No, sir; not certainly; but we think he must be either killed or made prisoner, since he has not fled.' Then the prince desired of them that they would mount their horses and ride over the field, that they might see what had become of him. They immediately did so; and, making for





THE PRINCE OF WALES AND THE CAPTIVE KING OF FRANCE ENTERING LONDON.

a small hillock, whence they might see about them, perceived a crowd of men-at-arms on foot, who were advancing slowly. In their midst was the king of France, who was in no small danger; for the English and Gascons had taken him from Sir Denis, and were disputing who should have him; one bawling out, 'It is I who have taken him,' and others replying, 'No, no, it is we.' The king, to escape from this peril, said: 'Sirs, I pray you conduct me and my son courteously to my cousin, the prince, and do not make a brawl about me; for I am so great a lord, that I can make you all rich enough.' Thus he quieted them for a space; but the quarrel was always beginning again, nor could they stir a step without brawling. When the two barons saw this, they descended the hillock, and spurred on to meet them, asking what was the matter. The men-at-arms answered, it was the king of France they had got, and that more than ten knights and squires claimed him as their prisoner. Upon this the barons pushed through the crowd by main force, and ordered each one to stand aside, commanding him,

on pain of death, to keep his distance and not come nigh, without being commanded to do so. So they all drew back behind the king; and the two barons, dismounting, advanced to him with much reverence, and conducted him right gently to the prince."

The king remained the prisoner of the prince till next spring, when he was taken over to London, the voyage and journey to which is a curious piece of old history.

They were eleven days and nights at sea; on the twelfth they landed at Sandwich, whence, after remaining two days to refresh themselves, they set out and came to Canterbury. They there stayed one day: on the morrow they rode to Rochester, rested there for a day, then to Dartford, and the fourth to London, where they were received with much honour.

The king of France, as he rode through London, was mounted on a gallant white steed, richly harnessed; the prince rode a little black hackney at his side, and thus they went to the Palace of the Savoy in the Strand. Here the king was lodged, and the

king and queen of England came to see him, consoling him all in their power. Shortly afterwards the king of France and his household were removed to Windsor Castle, where he and his son, the Lord Philip, were permitted to hunt, and hawk, and take such other diversions as they pleased. The rest of the French lords remained in London, prisoners on parole.

## THE MONTHS IN THE COUNTRY.

### JULY.

WITH the last days of June, the fixed fair weather and cloudless sunshine that had prevailed so long before, began to show symptoms of a coming change. That fresh and balmy spring-feeling in the air gave place at times to a close, breathless sultriness, which drove the cattle to the shelter of the trees, and prompted the pedestrian to defer his pleasant walks until the cool of the evening. And already, in the first days of July, the intense heats of noon exhale from the earth prodigious masses of vapour, which are stowed away in the wandering rain-clouds now seen floating about at all points of the compass, and which, towards sunset, lie in long interminable piles near the horizon, where they are lighted up by the rays of the westering orb, and assume a thousand fantastic forms. These beautiful apparitions are so many magazines of storm and thunder, which will burst upon the landscape, sooner or later, in drenching showers, to cool the ground and temper the sweltering atmosphere.

They are all busy as bees at Tangley during this month. First, there is the hay-harvest to be got in, and to that most important business Farmer Dobbs is just now directing his undivided attention. He has picked his mowers among the old and tried hands, who, he knows by experience, will shave pretty close to the soil, as he has a decided objection to leaving the heaviest portion of the crop, which is always that nearest the ground, unreaped. He is up before the dawn, to see them at their work himself, and decides at what point they shall commence operations; noting the direction of the wind and the lay of the ridges in the field, so that, if practicable, the mowers shall have the wind at their backs, with the grass bending away from them, and shall yet cut across the ridges. Further, he looks to the state of their weapons, and will tolerate no worn-out or jagged blades in the hands of his labourers. The whetting of the scythes, and the crashing, severing sweep of the long sharp blades through the close heavy swarth, are music in the farmer's ears, as, one after another, the band of mowers strike in, each a little in the rear of his predecessor, with space enough for an ample swathe between them. Woe now to the poor little field-mice, whose houses will be dismantled and their families sent adrift; to the little birds that have built their nests in the long grass; and to the poor humble-bees, who have stored the gatherings of the summer in the clefts of the turf. Beginning early, the sturdy mowers will get over nearly an acre a day per man, even of

the dense rich crops of Tangley Grange. No sooner is a small portion of the field clear for their operations, than in come the haymakers, with their tedding-forks and rakes, to follow in the track of the mowers, and by shaking it out, by tedding and tossing it about, to do their best towards "making hay while the sun shines." Four or five active hands are wanted for every mower; but their work is far lighter than his, and partakes so much of the nature of sport, that it is generally impossible to carry it on long without some spice of innocent merriment. The good farmer has not the least objection to this; but he keeps his eye on the work, and sees that, in spite of the frolic play, his people's pleasant task is yet properly attended to. There is small interval allowed for meal-times, and none of the workers leave the ground in this stage of the work. Towards evening, the haymakers, splitting into two bands, and working in contrary directions, gather up the hay into long narrow rows, called wind-rows, from which it is finally thrown up into "grass-cocks," in which condition it is left for the night; though the cocking, which is merely done as a precaution against rain in the night, is sometimes omitted when the weather is "set fair" and the night dews are comparatively light.

Coming into the same field next day, we find the mowers far advanced in the van, and repeating their work, still under the eye of the farmer. But the rakers and tedders are more numerous than before, though they do not commence work so early. Not till the dew is off the ground do they begin scattering the grass-cocks and spreading the mass loosely about, to dry in the sun. This is no sooner done, than the mowing of the morning has to be attended to, and the first operations of yesterday to be repeated. Again, in the evening, the mowing of the first day is gathered up in heaps, now larger than before, and called "hand-cocks," and thus left once more through the night. By the time the third day's mowing is well on, nearly the whole of that section of the population of Tangley village who meddle in farm work, have found their way to the Grange, and taken part in the haymaking. In addition to these, if you go to look on, you will be pretty sure to meet with a round number of amateurs, with the young families of the clergyman and some of the neighbouring gentry among them, who have come to the farm for the fun of handling a rake, of tumbling about in the new-mown hay, and of participating in the curds and cream which rosy-cheeked Marion and cheery Mrs. Dobbs are always happy to dispense on these occasions to such fair visitants.

In favourable weather many farmers can and do carry their hay on the third day; and a charming sight it is to see the loaded wains plodding and plunging with their fragrant burthen over the deep ruts along the green lanes, fringing as they go the pendant branches of the overshadowing trees with the sweet spoils of the meadow. The whole atmosphere is now redolent of this delicate odour for miles around, and it is wafted far and wide, invading even the close streets and purlieus of the crowded city, recalling to the imprisoned artisan and weary

world's worker, the memories of the country-side, and the long-vanished days of cloudless enjoyment.

Dobbs rarely carries his hay-crop on the third day—for economical reasons—having found it more profitable to do so on the fourth, or even later. He grows hay for his own consumption chiefly, and very little for the market; and, consequently, he has the welfare of his own flocks, herds and cattle, to consult—not the predilections of the town buyer. The Tangle hay is not so pale a colour as that which fetches the highest price in the town market. Though it is never “mow-burnt”—for Dobbs always takes especial care of that—it is yet fermented in some definite degree, and is glossy with something of a brownish tint. Then you will often find straw mixed with it; and if you put it to your lips, it will be saline to the taste, showing that salt has not at all been spared in the process of stacking. Dobbs finds that his cattle prefer hay thus prepared—that they will eat the straw mingled with it as freely as the rest, and that, while it is more economical in the use than unfermented hay, they all thrive well upon it.

We will leave the haymakers at their work, which they will hardly get through for the next fortnight, and, forsaking the busy hum of all this agreeable activity, plunge into the wood just for the sake of a contrast. The forest is now in the climax of its summer glory. The foliage of all the trees is now nearly alike in hue—one dark dense green, deepening in the far recesses almost to black, save where a thick grey haze shuts out the distance from the sight. Where, here and there, a gleam of sunlight breaks in across the glade, it flashes like a stream of fire upon the verdurous masses below and around, intensifying the gloom by the vivid contrast. Scarcely a sound is audible throughout the long, gorgeous, and cathedral-like avenues that tempt the step in every direction. The birds are all mute, or if they utter any sound at all, it is not a sound of song, but a single strange cry or chaffering note, for whose repetition you listen in vain, and which you are at a loss to fasten upon any particular songster.

“No warbling tongues

Now talk unto the echoes of the groves;  
Only the curled streams soft chidings keep,  
And little gusts that from the green leaves sweep  
Dry summer's dust, in fearful whispering stirred,  
As loath to waken any warbling bird.”

The only songsters, in short, at this time, are the insects, and they abound in countless myriads. In the quiet of the forest, by listening attentively, you may hear them to perfection.

“The gnats

Their murmuring small trumpets sounden wide,”

and fill the green solitude with a continuous surge of stilly noise, which, once recognised by the delicate ear, will haunt it the live-long day. Among these small fry, the buzz of the wild bee, as he comes bounding along in search of honey, booms portentously; and you may hear him for some time after he is out of sight, unless he happen to dive into some open blossom to prosecute his more serious labours, when, so long as business is to be done, he remains perfectly mute. Not so pleasant a com-

panion in the forest is the gentleman wasp, who carries a weapon which he is but too ready to use on the slightest provocation, or on none at all—and does no work. There are plenty of wasps' nests in these old forests, and at this season they are swarming with inhabitants, who, judging from the pother they make, do not seem to agree very well among themselves. They are fond of building in the hollows of trees—of old pollard willows especially; but a tree is by no means their exclusive choice. An artificial bank, composed of mingled earth and stones, is in fact often preferred even where hollow trees abound. They will dig out the dry earth from between the stones, and make their nests in the cavity far beneath the surface, which is thus safer from assaults than any tree hollow. Again, they will burrow beneath the protruding and gnarled roots of elms or oaks, and make their nests under-ground, reserving only a small hole for entrance. Their foes are numerous; birds will devour them by the dozen, in spite of their stings; hornets will carry them off and suck them dry; rats and weasels find a delicate luxury in their fat, milk-white larvæ; and it is said that master mole will rout them out and sack their city to the very last grub, if he can get at them. The most industrious and inveterate of their enemies, however, are the “lads of the village,” who know that the wasp-maggot is the best possible bait for all kinds of brook and river fish; and who, in July, when the grubs are at the fattest, make no scruple of blowing their nests up with gunpowder, and marching off with the larva-laden combs. Many such a trophy have we borne away in days long gone by, not without paying for the booty by sundry wounds inflicted by the desperate valour of the defenders.

Worse by far than the wasp is the hornet, a fiery-coloured monster, of more than double the size, and fortunately much more scarce—so scarce, indeed, that you may search for a whole summer in some districts without finding one. In the southern parts of Somerset, however, and in Devon, there are more than enough of them; their sting is almost as bad as the bite of the adder, but, like most very formidable creatures, and unlike the wasp, they rarely if ever use their weapons save in self-defence. Of butterflies, of all sorts and hues, there are now more than we have space to set down; they show like winged blossoms—flowers of the air—as, relieved by the dense green back-ground, they flutter up and down in the woods and green glades. And at nightfall, on the margin of the brook, clouds of white phantom-looking moths rise out of the grass by tens of thousands, most of whom, lured by the exhalations from the water, find their graves within it, and are devoured by the hungry fishes.

We have wandered out of the wood before we were aware of it, and are aroused to that fact by the sudden “hoot, hoot, hoo-oot,” followed by a startling peal from the wooden clappers of little Billy Bunce, the scarecrow. Here he is among the rye, doing his utmost at this moment to frighten off the birds from the crop, and raising a prodigious hulla-baloo as we approach. On a nearer view of Billy, we are inclined to suspect that he has been indulging in a surreptitious siesta

this sultry afternoon, under some friendly hedge, and that the birds have had too much of their own way among the corn for the last hour or two, and that this sudden show of enthusiasm is put on for the occasion. Billy works his wooden clapper, and exercises his voice, at fourpence a day, and if he is a good boy and not *caught* idling or sleeping at his post, he gets a bit of supper into the bargain. The daily fourpence is a welcome addition to the scanty income of his widowed mother, who, the relic of a farm-labourer, is herself at work up on yonder slope, hoeing turnips, at which she has been ploddingly engaged ever since six in the morning. Poor Nelly Bunce's day's work is good for eightpence and a jug of skimmed milk from the dairy, which she will have to fetch, or send Billy for it when they leave off work. Perhaps the lowest of all occupants of the kingdom of labour, who have *any* recognised position, are these poor women workers on the farm: they are paid by the day at a minimum rate of wages; they are not paid when the weather is such as to prevent their working, and consequently they are driven to work in the face of storms and tempests which pierce them to the bones, and plague them with agues and rheumatisms, and often send them to their graves at an age when other women are yet hale and hearty. And all this they undergo for a pittance which, taken at an average, would not pay the washing-bills of a tradesman's wife. Nelly Bunce, in wet weather, wears a ragged man's coat, cropped of its buttons, over a coarse russet gown; at present the coat is laid aside, for the hot sun has thawed the rheumatism out of her for a while, and she can do with only an apron. A flat crush bonnet, and a pair of cut down man's boots, complete her visible costume; such is the uniform of her class, and Nelly has no pretensions beyond it. After all, Nelly is content—which, for all we know, may be a thing to be rejoiced at: if you talk to her she does not grumble, but takes things as they come, and is not half so solicitous about the future as you might expect her to be. She has much more apathy than sympathy in her mental constitution; and, so far, is buckled by a benevolent Providence against the hard conditions of her lot.

When Farmer Dobbs has carried all his hay and got it fairly stacked under the rick-cloths, in ricks of moderate size—for he is not a man of extremes either way—and has seen the thatching in progress, he has time to turn his attention to a few other matters that want looking after. Now he is off to look at the corn-crops, and see that Billy Bunce with his clapper, and that other scare-crow Tom 'Tils, whom he has intrusted with an old gun and a few blank charges, are diligently on the watch. If he catch them asleep, he will wake them up with his whip, maugre all laws against assault and battery. 'Then he is off, to look at the oxen and sheep pasturing together in the meadows by the brook; and a very satisfactory and picturesque sight it is that meets the farmer's eye at this pleasant spot. The day is fizzing hot—the July sun darting down his rays from a deep blue sky without a cloud. The sheep, after feeding full off the sweet grass, have lain

down under the shadow of the trees, to sleep off their full meal in the cool shade. As for the oxen, they have nearly all found their way into the water, where they stand enjoying the fresh bath, and swishing the flies from their sides with their long tails. Yon sturdy bull alone declines the water, preferring to cool his tough hide amidst the green bushes, into which he has backed his huge bulk out of the fierce sunshine. Dobbs is quite satisfied with their condition, and now he walks on to look at that speculation of hops, just to see what prospect there may be of a crop. The hops want pruning, having spread too freely, and he sets young Giles about that business forthwith, while the weather is hot enough to cauterize the wounds inflicted by the knife, and prevent the waste of sap. Next he turns his attention to the potatoes, in which he is more than usually interested this year, because of his new experiment; and, as they have come up well, he gives orders to have them carefully hoed, that they may get fair play. As for Mrs. Dobbs, we have only to mention that her feathered broods have all done well, and her stock of poultry of all sorts is far beyond the wants of the farm, and will have to be thinned off, dead or alive, for the Bilsbury market. Meanwhile, the affairs of the dairy go on as briskly as ever, and the store of Tangle cheese bids fair to be, as usual, excellent in quality, and more abundant than ever.

Soon after the hay-harvest, the grasshoppers begin to assert themselves in a most vociferous manner. One of our favourite poets finds a charm in the song of this insect, which many people fail to recognise. It is Keats who says:—

"The poetry of earth is never dead;  
When all the birds are faint with the hot sun,  
And hide in cooling trees, a voice will run  
From hedge to hedge about the new-mown mead;  
That is the grasshopper's."

So long as the voice runs from hedge to hedge, we have no objection to it; but when it rises in chorus incessantly from every turf in the field, we are apt to feel our teeth set on edge, and to be reminded of ten thousand garden gates whose hinges want oiling, and all on the swing at once. It requires more imagination than we possess to discern poetry in the chirping of myriads of grasshoppers: the croaking of frogs, we should think, has an equal claim to harmony, and of the two we are inclined to prefer the latter. Their song, however, must be music sweet enough to the birds, who now devour them by whole hecatombs, and to whom they doubtless afford a rich treat. It is astonishing to note how rapidly their vast swarms disappear, so soon as they commence their clamorous cry of "Come and eat me." In a fortnight there is hardly one to be found, in places where you could not have sat down without being covered with them. As a bait for fish the grasshopper is excellent, and by its skilful use numbers of trout may be killed, though a tyro will fail in handling it. Dobbs generally takes any trout that he may happen to want towards the end of July, with a grasshopper, unless the stream should have been fouled by some sudden shower, in which case he will troll with an artificial minnow with much greater success.

We must not forget the field-flowers of this



month. All the spring flowers have now disappeared, and in their place a new floral world has sprung up. The hedge-rows are now covered with climbing-plants—the clematis, the wild hop, the white convolvulus, etc. In the corn-fields, the red poppy glows like a coal of fire—the purple thistle-flower blows on crags and in dry ditches—the slender hare-bell trembles on every bank—the mallow, the scabious, and the woody-nightshade adorn the roadside fences, and on the moors and downs, the fragrant blossoms of the wild-thyme and the bell-heath colour the surface of the soil. The fox-glove still rears his rows of bells, but drops them unwillingly around him as the month wanes out, after which he looks as melancholy as a peacock moulted of his tail, and no longer excites attention or remark.

Towards the close of the month, there is a sudden and characteristic change in the weather. Without any warning, the wind chops round to the north; those heavy-laden rain-clouds, driven up from the horizon, overshadow the whole sky; the scowl of the coming tempest blackens the air, and all at once, amid the din of reverberating thunder, down comes the storm of rain like a water-spout, flooding the lanes and low-lands of Tangley Grange a foot deep in a few minutes of time. Well for Dobbs that he has long ago foreseen this visitation and prepared for it—that his ricks are safely thatched, and that trenches are dug round them to carry off the flood. As it is, there is no small hurry-scurry at the farm, where the labourers are crowding in for shelter from all quarters, and when poor Nelly Bunce and her boy Billy, among the rest, come driving through the mud and mire, away from the bursting floods and live thunder. Along with the storm has come a chill as sudden. The temperature, which yesterday was 88° in the shade, has now fallen to 50°, and Dobbs has no sooner set affairs out-of-doors a little to rights, than he orders the maid to light a fire in the parlour, that he may sit by it and smoke a comfortable pipe, while his storm-driven dependants make themselves as cosy as they can round the common hearth.

Such are the vicissitudes of our English climate, which are perhaps never seen in greater contrast than during this sweltering month of July.

#### INSIDE THE POST OFFICE.

THE Post Office presents almost the only example of a government trading establishment, conducted, perhaps, better than it could be conducted under any possible combination of private enterprise, and producing a large yearly profit that exhibits a steady increase. This profit, after paying expenses, amounted in 1858 to more than a million and a quarter sterling, which was paid into the Exchequer, as usual, in relief of the taxation of the nation. It is a question whether this money might not be judiciously expended in improving the postal system, or in reducing the postal rates; but the Chancellor of the Exchequer is not willing to give up such a large portion of the annual pub-

lic income, and the Postmaster-General is therefore encouraged to make the balance as large as he possibly can. This profit was derived from receiving and delivering 523 millions of letters, in the proportion of 428 millions to England, forty-four millions to Ireland, and fifty-one millions to Scotland; from the foreign and colonial letters, an unimportant item; and from the commission on issuing nearly twelve and three-quarters of millions sterling in money orders for the United Kingdom. This latter department, which, in its operations, much resembles banking, is not a portion of the postal system properly so called, and is conducted in a distinct building in St. Martin's-le-Grand.

Nearly one-fourth of the whole 523 millions of letters in 1858 were delivered in London and the suburban districts; and, counting those also which were despatched, nearly one half passed through the London chief office. The number of newspapers delivered in the United Kingdom during the same year, were seventy-one millions, and the number of book packets seven millions and a quarter. One letter in every three hundred was returned to the writers, owing to the failure in the attempts to deliver them; and one newspaper in every hundred and twenty-four newspapers, for the same reason; making, in the first case, nearly one million and three-quarters of letters during the year, and in the second case, nearly six hundred thousand newspapers.

The receiving-houses and post offices provided for this enormous circulation, now number eleven thousand and a quarter throughout the United Kingdom, and the pillar letter-boxes, which are gradually advancing in use and popularity, and are at present confined to the metropolis, have now reached one thousand, one hundred, and sixty-eight.

From the moment that a letter leaves the hand of the sender, and falls into the box, it becomes the property of the Post Office, for purposes of delivery, and cannot be withdrawn. If it contains any hasty phrase, any bitterness of tone that the writer regrets; if its weight is considered greater than the head or heads upon its surface will carry; or if any important particular is thought to be omitted in its address, it must, nevertheless, go unaltered through all the allotted stages of its course. What this course is, from the receiving-house to the railway carriage, (supposing it to be a country letter,) it may not be uninteresting or unimportant to explain.

When Mary Jane, your intelligent maid-servant, takes your letter addressed to your aunt at Bolton, in Lancashire, her powers of reading and discrimination are exercised at the grocer's shop round the corner, where she finds two upright letter-slips in the door-post, one marked "London and twelve miles round," and the other, "Inland and colonial mails." She first of all has to consider whether Bolton comes within the range of "twelve miles round London;" and when she has decided this geographical point in the negative, either singly, or by the help of the receiving-house attendant, she then drops the letter into the compartment devoted to the colonial and country post. Supposing the

time at which she has done this to be five o'clock in the afternoon, and the receiving-house to be within a reasonable omnibus distance of the General Office, in about half an hour your aunt's letter will be disturbed from its short repose, and taken by a couple of faded gaudy drivers, in a more faded scarlet, hard-worked, dog-cart-looking vehicle, to St. Martin's-le-Grand. Here it will be bundled into a large hall, called the General Sorting Office, not unlike Exeter Hall, furnished with long rows of tables, desks, and shelves, at which are seated a number of active, earnest-looking, time-begrudging beings, every one engaged as if legerdemain had been his sole occupation from the cradle, and as if he had a certain task to perform, with only another hour to live. Taskmasters are passing to and fro directing and inspecting the work, but the chief taskmaster of all is a large clear-faced clock, which watches the hurrying crowd with the calm steady look of a sphinx, and which is glanced at in its turn by some of the labourers as the conductor of an orchestra is glanced at by timid performers.

Your aunt's letter is at once turned out of the bag on to the top of a large table amongst a heap of other letters—a fortuitous concourse of atoms—mixed and entangled as only a mound of letters can be entangled and mixed. Some fifty men attack them immediately, like eager bone-pickers at a virgin dust-heap, or rather, considering their playing-card shape and appearance, like maniac gamblers at a scramble when the police are knocking at the outer gate.

All this activity has no other object than to “face” them, to put those troublesome letters on their backs, which are obstinately lying on their faces, and to turn those other letters round upon their legs which are at that moment standing on their heads. As fast as a pack that makes a full handful is scratched into order, it is transferred to another table, where the letters undergo another process of stamping.

This process has to obliterate the postage heads, so that they can never be taken off and used again, and also to stamp the letter with a circular impression, containing the date and the name of London—the town from which the letter is about to be despatched. This task is confided to a nimble-fingered gentleman, who seems inclined to back himself against any steam-engine under the roof, past, present, or to come. Placing a number of letters before him in an upright position, with the postage head in the upper right corner, he strokes them down gently but rapidly, one by one, under his right hand, which holds the stamping die, and comes down with unerring precision and bewildering rapidity full upon the label. A hundred heads are damaged in a minute by this skilful operator, who requires a new die every evening; and the only partial break that occurs in his labour, is when a letter either wants a head, or contains it in the lower left hand, instead of the upper right-hand corner. Dipping the die on to the ink-brush, or stamping a paper at intervals, that stands at his side, to keep a rough record in twenties or fifties of the letters passing through the office for that night's mail, are eccentric diversions of the

head-blotting duty, performed almost too quickly to strike the eye.\*

After your aunt's letter, and its companions, have suffered this ring-worm disfigurement, and also the similar disfigurement of the dating stamp, they are parcelled out to be sorted into bags for the different leading towns, or into divisions for the resorting on the different lines of railway.

Those letters that are perfect in full payment and clear handwriting, are sent to their final bag, or their temporary division, without further questioning or examination; but those corpulent documents, whose bodies have grown too big for their heads, or in whose cases two heads are officially considered to be better than one, are transferred to the weighing clerk; while those letters whose addresses are faintly conveyed in the yellowest of ink, the most cramped of cramped writings, of the most unknown of unknown tongues, are transferred to a table of officers, skilful in solving these passing dark problems, and known throughout the department as the “blind-men” of the Post Office.

The weighing clerk is an officer cultivated in sight and touch, whose eye can detect, in an instant, the letter that is attempting to pass on its journey at half-price, and whose finger, by merely gliding over the surface of the doubtful letters in the process of counting them, can at once assist and confirm the judgment of the sharp and experienced eye. Not one letter in a dozen, perhaps, that is overweight, requires weighing, and not one half of the suspected impostors are convicted and marked with the postal double payment fine.

The table of the “blind-men” is the calmest spot in the building. There is no work of mere mechanical dexterity, that can be brought by constant practice to a dazzling rapidity of execution. It requires much searching in directories, much guessing, much mental effort, to solve most of the riddles in writing and spelling that come upon this table. The irregular combinations of the alphabet alone present a boundless field of variety to the ignorant and the persevering; and when the combinations of christian names and surnames, names of towns, and names of counties, as well as the forms of letters, and the parts of a letter's proper superscription, come to be added, arithmetic can hardly convey the result. It is to this table that all those riddle-letters find their way, upon whose surface Islington is spelt and written, “East Linton;” and the late Iron Duke is addressed, long after his death, as the “Duk hor wellenton, Ip ark corner, London, englent, or hulsweat.” The blind-men are often called upon to decipher such directions as the following, conveyed in the most undecided of handwritings:—

“To Mrs. Slater to the Prince of wales in fits Roy place Kinteston London paid.” The blind-men decide that this means the “Prince of Wales” public-house, Fitzroy Place, Kentish Town; and their verdict is final.

\* We are indebted to Mr. Edward J. Page, the active Inspector General of Mails, at the General Post Office, and to Mr. Maclean, of the same department, for most of the information contained in this article, and for the facilities which enabled the writer to see what he has been attempting to describe.

Sometimes comic boys address their relatives in London in the rudest pictorial form, giving a good deal of trouble to the blind-men. A picture of a garden and a street, with a fancy portrait of the person for whom the letter is intended, drawn outside the note by a not very artistic youth of seven years of age, is not calculated to ease the sorting labour of the General Post Office. Addressed to "My Uncle Jon, in London;" "Wilm Stratton, commonly cald teapot Weelin;" "Mary Ann Street, Red Rive lane Luke St. next door to the ocean;" "To No. 3 Cros bsry Row For The Female whith the Infant up Bromley Stairs;" "Ann Poror at Mrs. Winhursts No. 24 Next door to two to one;" "Mikell Goodliff at St. Nouts Printis to a Shoo Maker Mis his name not known Mrs. Cooper is grandmother to the Lad;" "elixa clark saxton hotel saintluord hon se;" and "This fanke Taghe Warkitt ill Wise Comse Wile of Withe," with many more like them have come, and are constantly coming under the notice of this branch of the sorting department.

The blind-men feel a professional artistic pride in mastering every difficulty, although the difficulty is to be taken to the land's end for the small charge of a penny. Failing all attempts to make clear that which is never to be read in this world, the interior (after the proper forms have been observed) is, at last, looked into, only to present a larger and more enigmatical surface still. The only colourable explanation that can be given of the mystery, based upon the annual average of riddles which come before the blind-men, is, that some Irish hop-picker, passing through London on his road to Kent, is anxious to communicate with a relative in some part of his native country.

The Sorting Office for newspapers and packets is upon an upper floor, and is reached by an endless staircase, worked by machinery, which revolves and ascends, like the spokes of the treading mill. The business in this department is very similar to that below, except that the sorting proceeds more slowly, and the packets, while fewer, are much larger. The "blind-man" here is chiefly engaged with the newspapers, whose moist addresses have either come off, or been partially torn, and his work, like that of the department, is the heaviest on Friday night, the great newspaper despatch night of the week. He employs himself a good deal in guessing the kind of newspaper which would probably go to certain individuals, when he finds himself with a number of addresses without papers, and a number of papers without addresses. No disappointment is so bitter to the country resident as to miss his weekly budget of news and reading, when he comes down to breakfast on a Saturday morning, or to tear open the cover, and find a tory organ, which he hates, in place of the whig organ, which he loves. The newspaper blind-man performs his work as carefully as he can, and if he does make an occasional mistake in sending the wrong paper to the wrong man, his countrymen must forgive him, when they know the difficulties with which he has to contend.

By a quarter past seven the first set of newspaper bags are made up, sealed, and sent gliding down a

long shining slide into the court-yard of the building, where they meet with many companions in the shape of the first letter bags sent from the general Sorting Office, for the railway post office vans below. These bags are quickly packed in one of the dull red and black omnibus-looking vehicles waiting to receive them, and are driven off to the railway terminus, for which they have been partially sorted and packed. Your aunt's letter, being for Bolton in Lancashire, is sent to Euston Square some time before half-past eight, where it is placed with a host of companions in that series of glowing carriages which often excites the curiosity of the railway night traveller. Here much of the sorting-work of the General Post Office is merely transferred, and it goes on unceasingly through the night and morning, as well as the reception, re-sorting, and delivery of the cross-country posts, which are taken in and despatched by the way. A number of clerks and guards, who are relieved at certain stages, attend to this labour, while the carriages in which they stand are rolling along at the rate of five-and-forty miles an hour. Your aunt's letter, after being turned out of its divisional bag on to the green baize counter of this flying post office, is sorted into a pigeon-hole, where it remains until it collects a certain number of companions to form a bundle. This bundle is then tied up, and dropped into the Bolton bag, which hangs up, with a brass ticket on it, at the side of the carriage. When the time arrives for this bag to be closed, that is, when the train arrives within a few miles of the town, the despatch is sealed up, and put in a rough leather covering, and without stopping a moment or slackening one degree of a mile an hour in the speed, the Bolton letters are dropped, by the aid of some external machinery, safely into a roadside net. Here the post office authorities of the town are waiting to receive them, having dropped, in exchange, a number of full bags into a projecting net of the flying carriage, and by the time the bag is opened, and your aunt's letter is ready for delivery, before she comes down to breakfast in the morning, the railway post office has gone on catching and discharging letters along a further line of two hundred miles.

## CROSSING THE TICINO:

### A SCENE BEFORE THE WAR.

WE soon approached the Ticino, the boundary between Sardinia and Austrian Lombardy. The Ticino is a majestic river, here spanned by one of the finest bridges in Italy. It contains eleven arches; is of the granite of Mount Tofano; and, like almost all the great modern works in Italy, was commenced by Napoleon, though finished only after his fall. Here, then, was the gate of Austria; and seated at that gate I saw three Croats—fit keepers of Austrian order.

I was not ignorant of the hand these men had had in the suppression of the revolution of 1848, and of the ruthless tragedies they were said to have enacted in Milan and other cities of Lombardy; and I rode up to them in the eager desire of scrutinizing their features, and reading there

the signs of that ferocity which had given them such wide-spread but evil renown. They sat basking themselves on a bench in front of the Dogana, with their muskets and bayonets glittering in the sun. They were lads of about eighteen, of decidedly low stature, of square build, and strongly muscular. They looked in capital condition, and gave every sign that the air of Lombardy agreed with them, and that they had had their own share at least of its corn and wine. They wore blue caps, gray duffle greatcoats like those used by our Highlanders, light blue pantaloons fitting closely their thick short leg, and boots which rose above the ankle, and laced in front. The prevailing expression on their broad swarthy faces was not ferocity, but stolidity. Their eyes were dull, and contrasted strikingly with the dark fiery glances of the children of the land. They seemed men of appetites rather than passions; and, if guilty of cruel deeds, were likely to be so from the dull, cold, unreflecting ferocity of the bull-dog, rather than from the warm impulsive instincts of the nobler animals. In stature and feature they were very much the barbarian, and were admirably fitted for being what they were—the tools of the despot. No wonder that the ideal Italian abominates the *Croat*.

The Dogana! So soon! 'Twas but a few miles on the other side of the Ticino that we passed through this ordeal. But perhaps the river, glorious as it looks, flowing from the democratic hills of the Swiss, may have infected us with political pravity; so here again we must undergo the search, and that not a mere *pro forma* one. The diligence vomits forth, at all its mouths, trunks, carpet-bags, and packages, encased, some in velvet, some in fir-deals, and some in brown paper. The multifarious heap was carried into the Dogana, and its various articles unroped, unlocked, and their contents scattered about. One might have thought that a great fair was about to begin, or that a great Industrial Exhibition was to be opened on the banks of the Ticino. The hunt was especially for books—bad books, which England will perversely print, and Englishmen perversely read. My little stock was collected, bound together with a cord, and sent in to the chief douanier, who sat, Radamanthus-like, in an inner apartment, to judge books, papers, and persons. There is nothing there, thought I, to which even an Austrian official can take exception. Soon I was summoned to follow my little library. The man examined the collection volume by volume. At last he lighted on a number of the "*Gazetta del Popolo*," given me by the editors in Turin. This, thought I, will prove the dead fly in my box of ointment. The sheet was opened and examined. "Have you," said the official, "any more?" I could reply with a clear conscience that I had not. To my surprise, the paper was returned to me. He next took up my note-book. Now, said I to myself, this is a worse scrape than the other. What a blockhead I am not to have put the book into my pocket; for, except in extreme cases, the traveller's person is never searched. The man opened the thin volume, and found it inscribed with mysterious and strange characters. It was written in short-hand. He turned over the leaves; on every page

the same unreadable signs met the eye. He held it by the top, and next by the bottom: it was equally inscrutable either way. He shut it, and examined its exterior, but there was nothing on the outside to afford a key to the mystic characters within. He then turned to me for an explanation of the suspicious little book. Affecting all the unconcern I could, I told him that it contained only a few commonplace jottings of my journey. He opened the book; took one other leisurely survey of it; then looked at me, and back again at the book; and, after a considerable pause, big with the fate of my book, he made me a bland bow, and handed me the volume. I was equally polite on my part, inly resolving that henceforward Austrian douanier should not lay finger on my note-book.

Refreshing it verily was to turn from the petty tyrannies of an Austrian custom-house, to the free, joyous, and glorious face of nature. Before me were the Alps, just shaking the cold night mists from their shaggy pine-clad sides, as might a lion the dew-drops from his mane. Here rose Monte Rosa in a robe of never-fading glory and beauty; and there stood Mont Blanc, with his diadem of dazzling snows. The giant had planted his feet deep amid rolling hills, covered with villages, and pine-forests, and rich pastures. Anywhere else these would have been mountains; but, dwarfed by the majestic form in whose presence they stood, they looked like small eminences, scattered gracefully at his base, as pebbles at the foot of some lofty pile. On his breast floated the fleecy clouds of morn, while his summit rose high above these clouds, and stood, in the calm of the firmament, a stupendous pile of ice and snow. Never had I seen the Alps to such advantage. The level plain ran quite up to them, and allowed the eye to take their full height from their flower-girt base to their icy summit. Hundreds and hundreds of peaks ran along the sky, conical, serrated, needle-shaped, jagged, some flaming like the ruby in the morning ray, others dazzlingly white as the alabaster.—Wylie's "*Pilgrimage to Italy*."

#### RETIREMENT.

I PRAISE the Frenchman,\* his remark was shrewd,  
How sweet, how passing sweet is solitude!  
But grant me still a friend in my retreat,  
Whom I may whisper—Solitude is sweet.  
Yet neither these delights, nor aught beside,  
That appetite can ask, or wealth provide,  
Can save us always from a tedious day,  
Or shine the dulness of still life away;  
Divine communion, carefully enjoy'd,  
Or sought with energy, must fill the void.  
Oh sacred art! to which alone life owes  
Its happiest seasons, and a peaceful close,  
Scorn'd in a world, indebted to that scorn  
For evils daily felt and hardly borne,  
Not knowing thee, we reap with bleeding hands,  
Flowers of rank odour upon thorny lands,  
And, while experience cautions us in vain,  
Grasp seeming happiness, and find it pain.

COWPER.

\* Bruyere.